

A Spirit-Sustained Acknowledgment

Introduction

The Text

⁸“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say,¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:8–12)

The Holy Spirit

- A. It seems to me that beneath the challenging, at times confusing, even troubling words of Jesus in our text here this morning, there is a pronounced emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. Jesus is here drawing our attention, I believe, to the Helper, to the One who will sustain us in the days ahead . . . the Holy Spirit—who is really, in some mysterious way, Jesus Himself come to take up residence within us.
- B. So I’m going to bring three things out from this text for us to consider, and they all revolve around this idea of the Holy Spirit: (1) Requiring the Holy Spirit (vv. 8-9); (2) Receiving the Holy Spirit (v. 10); and (3) Resting in the Holy Spirit (vv. 11-12).

(1) Requiring the Holy Spirit (vv. 8-9)

After That Comes Judgment

- A. Look back at vv. 8-9 with me again: “⁸ And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,⁹ but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” If we honestly heard these words from Jesus to us . . . we would be trembling!
- B. The final judgment is in view. As the author of Hebrews writes: “[I]t is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment . . .” (Heb 9:27). Contrary to the atheist’s claim that we die and just kind of dissolve back down into the dust; contrary to the Buddhist’s claim that we die only to reincarnate again and again in a seemingly endless cycle; the Scriptures come to us with this fearsome claim: You will die once, and then you will stand before a holy God.
 - 1. And here’s the thing that Jesus is saying in our text: “What you do with Me now affects what I will do with you then. If you acknowledge Me before men I will acknowledge you on that day. But if you deny Me before men, I will deny you.”

Private and Public

- A. Now I want to make what might be a surprising observation in view of the broader context in which our text is found.
1. We must remember that for so many verses now in what's come before, Jesus has been talking about the danger of public religion. His whole case in the confrontation with the Pharisees and the lawyers was that religion must be private—a matter of the heart. It cannot be that you project something in the public square but then deny it in your bedroom. Your true religion is fundamentally found out in secret. It's who you are in the closet, who you are when no one is looking.
- B. But then here we come to [Luke 12:8](#) and He seems to be saying just the opposite: "O your religion better be public. If you are not willing to go public with it well then I fear it is not real at all." Did you notice? The whole matter turns on what you are doing "[before men.](#)"
1. Is your faith in Christ playing out before men or is it something you are too ashamed of, something you keep to yourself, like a good American in a secular, pluralistic culture. Don't stir up the pot by bringing up your religion. "O sure I have a relationship with Christ, but no one else needs to know." To which Jesus would say, "Beware brother, sister! ['\[E\]veryone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God . . .'](#) (v. 8)."
- C. And we are left scratching our heads. Which is it? Is our religion to be private or public? Well, Jesus' answer, of course, is: "Yes!"
1. He starts by calling for one's faith to be private and personal because that is truly where it begins. One must be changed in the heart, who he is must be transformed. There has to be genuine love for God and neighbor there.
 2. But, and this is the critical point for us this morning, if you truly have love for God and neighbor, if it is truly a matter of your heart, if you have been born again by the Spirit of God from above, well then it will come out from your closet and make an appearance in the public square.
- D. When you have truly met and been transformed by Jesus, you cannot keep it partitioned in some safe little corner of your life. It breaks out into all of life. He transforms everything about you.
1. To be a Christian is not just to add an event to your schedule on Sunday mornings, it's to have everything you do radically reoriented by God's gospel and grace. You don't work in the same way, rest in the same way, play in the same way, eat in the same way, talk in the same way, and so forth. Everything is touched by the Spirit. In everything Christ is acknowledged as your Lord, Savior, and Treasure.
 - a. As Paul puts it: "[\[W\]hatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him](#)" (Col 3:17).

But They Won't Like Us

- A. Now, if this is the call of the Christian—to acknowledge Him in all things before men—and if Jesus really is our Lord, Savior, and Treasure, why do we so often prefer to keep it all to ourselves?
1. Well, I think the answer is found in the surrounding verses of our text this morning. But to put it simply up front here: Because, if we talk about Him, people won't like us.
- B. I've mentioned that there is this rising conflict now between Jesus and the status quo religious leaders in Israel in His day. It is becoming so heated, so incendiary, that Jesus has now taken to warning His disciples. He's aware that those who hate Him will soon be hating them for following Him. To make a friend of Jesus is to make many more enemies.
1. So it is not a decision one makes lightly. And Jesus' point here is that it is not a decision one can make secretly. If you are to follow Him, you cannot, at the same time, be ashamed of Him. You have to acknowledge Him even in the face of opposition.
- C. Now, I should say, in our day, here in America, we like to talk about Christianity, and Christians for that matter, as being "under fire". There is talk of us losing our cultural influence, our prominence in society, and so forth.
1. I suppose in some sense we can and should bemoan these facts. But the fact of the matter is that we know very little of the sort of thing Jesus is preparing His disciples for here.
 - a. He's not talking about being mocked by a news anchor for our backwards beliefs. He's not talking about someone hitting the angry face on your Facebook post ("They don't like me?!"). He's not talking about coworkers not wanting to eat with you at your lunch break.
 - i. He's talking about people knocking down your door in the middle of the night with an aim to kill you . . . simply because you follow Him.
- D. That's why Jesus says what He does back up there in v. 4: "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do." He's not just saying that for dramatic effect. He's saying it because this is an impending reality for these disciples (cf. vv. 11-12).
1. Like He would later tell Peter by the Sea of Galilee, after His resurrection: " ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. ' ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me'" (John 21:18–19).
 2. Or we might think later of Paul who, when saying goodbye to the elders there at the church in Ephesus says this: " ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22–24).

- E. I was recently listening to a sermon and the pastor referenced a time he was visiting the underground church in China and the church in parts of India. And when he was in India, he was so struck by how serious everyone took their faith. He asked one of the leaders: “So, where are the casual ones? Where the guys who just kind of show up for an hour or so on Sundays, if it’s convenient, and then go about their everyday lives through the week with little thought to their faith or the church or the mission of God?”
1. And this man replied essentially: “There is no such Christian here. If you receive Christ here, you are disowned. You lose everything. No one makes such a decision lightly. They have counted the cost and found Jesus worthy of it. They have chosen to follow Him at price of their life. And, unsurprisingly, consequently, He has become their life!”
- F. You see, this is more like the context into which Jesus is speaking here. And we must learn from it. This is the decision every follower of Christ must make, whether he/she is immediately facing the threat of death or not.
1. Every disciple must take up his cross and follow after Him. It is not as if the Indian Christian must take up his cross while the American Christian takes up his easy chair. No! We all are to lose our lives for His sake that we might find our lives in Him.
- G. So, if we are not willing to go public with our faith in Christ, if we have no burning in our heart to make Him known, if we change our dialect depending on who we are with, if we are more like amoebas than ambassadors . . . well then we have reason to pause and consider where we are with Christ in the first place.

We All Get Afraid

- A. When Jesus talks about denial here, let’s be clear: I don’t think He’s talking about momentary lapses of faith from fear of man or whatever. He’s talking about a settled position of public rejection.
- B. Undoubtedly, every true Christian comes to these places of fear all the time. We are not always trumpeting with Paul in [Rom 1:16](#): “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . .” Sometimes, if we’re honest, we are . . . ashamed.
1. Sometimes, it seems, even Paul could be tempted towards such a thing. That’s why he writes in [Eph 6:18-20](#): “¹⁸ [Pray] at all times in the Spirit . . . [K]eep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”
 - a. He’s saying, “Am I scared? Of course. What man in his right mind wouldn’t be? But I’m not just going to cower. I’m not going to let this fear settle into something normal. I’m not going to call it okay. I’m going to push back against it. Pray for me. Pray that the Spirit would give me words to speak and a boldness to actually open my mouth!”

- C. Let me ask you: Why do you think we have Home Groups gathering throughout the week? Why do you think we encourage you to plug in there? So we can all have some happy-slappy fellowship time? Now, don't get me wrong, Community is one of our core values here. I hope you enjoy one another and find it fun to gather. But God forgive us if that's the extent of it, if that's the only thing our groups are good for. No!
1. We gather so we can pray like this for one another; so we can embolden, en-courage one another for the mission; so we can push back the fear that we are so prone to make peace with and say: "No! We will not settle for casual, comfortable, complacent Christianity. We don't want to be scared in the neighborhood. We don't want to be scared in the workplace. We don't want to be scared with our extended family or friends. We want to acknowledge You before men, Jesus. Send your Spirit to help us!"
- D. This is precisely what the early church did when it would gather. In [Acts 4](#), they are scared for their lives. So they come together and they pray: "²⁹ Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" ([Acts 4:29–31](#)). They pray: "God help! We are scared, we need the Spirit!"

We All Need the Holy Spirit

- A. And this shouldn't surprise us. As Paul writes in [1 Cor 12:3](#): "[N]o one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (cf. [1 John 4:2](#)).
- B. In other words, this whole issue of acknowledging or denying Jesus turns now on this idea of the Holy Spirit. No one will have the courage to profess Him before men if the Spirit doesn't quicken our hearts and open our mouths. We need Jesus to acknowledge Jesus!
1. That's why He says in [Acts 1](#): "Don't go proclaiming, don't go out on mission until the day of Pentecost, until I pour out my Spirit from heaven. I don't expect you to have the ability in and of yourself. In fact, I know you don't. That's why I've come."
- C. The courage doesn't come from somewhere deep in you, it comes from the Spirit of the One who stood for His Father even when the whole world stood against Him there at Calvary. His Spirit is in you: "⁷ God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God . . ." ([2 Tim 1:7–8](#)).
- D. So our big problem in the matter before us, brothers and sisters, it seems to me, isn't that we don't have boldness. It's that somewhere along the way we stopped praying for it, we stopped pounding on heaven's door in pursuit of it, we became okay without it, we grew comfortable in our timidity and functional denial.
1. Jesus never expected us to have the courage in and of ourselves, but He certainly expects that we should call it down for ourselves from Him.

(2) Receiving the Holy Spirit (v. 10)

The Unforgivable Sin

- A. So we require the Holy Spirit if we are to acknowledge Him before men without fear. And now it seems to me that, in v. 10, Jesus is going to get explicit about our need to receive the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. His words here are a bit enigmatic, and they've long been debated, but I trust you'll see what I mean: *"And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."*
- B. The point here certainly is not that the Son has a bit thicker skin than the Spirit. Jesus can take a harsh remark, but the Spirit, that guy is sensitive, He holds a grudge. You can offend Jesus, but if you offend the Spirit, it's over. That's not the point.
- C. Instead, I think it is to say that one sin, one rejection, is more fundamental than the other.
 - 1. I might put it like this: If you reject the Spirit you will have none of the Son—you won't have His forgiveness through the cross, His resurrection power. The Spirit exists to draw you towards the Son. If you reject the Spirit, neither will you receive the Son.
 - 2. But, on the other hand, it is possible to receive the Spirit, the forgiveness of Christ, the life-changing power of union with Him, and still momentarily, in a lapse of faith, surrendering to fear, speak a word against Jesus. But in such cases, the Spirit in you grieves, convicts, leads you to confession, and back to fullness of faith.
 - a. This is the sort of thing Paul brings together in Eph 4:30: *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

Peter and Judas

- A. I think it might help to illustrate this for you for just moment. Here is where we might consider the difference between Peter and Judas.
- B. With this talk of denial, surely, those of us who know our Bibles, thought of Peter and his denials of Christ near the end of things. Jesus says: "If you deny Me I will deny you." But that didn't happen with Peter. Why not?
 - 1. Well, I think it's because of what we are seeing here. Peter had spoken a word against the Son, but He was fundamentally open to the influence of the Spirit (Matt 16:17; John 14:17). When a man has the Spirit of Christ, he may no doubt experience times of fear, and faithlessness, he may even deny Christ momentarily in public. But the Spirit in him won't let it end there. The Spirit leads the man to repentance and restoration. Because He has the Spirit, He will be led out of this error, you see.
- C. But in the case of Judas, the denial was not momentary or passing, it was fundamental. It was a resistance not just of Jesus but of the Spirit. He had not opened to the Spirit's overtures but resisted them from the start.

1. This is why Jesus would say back at the beginning, referring to Judas: “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil” (John 6:70). He never opened to the Spirit’s influence and, hence, at a fundamental level He remained unforgiven, unchanged, and will ultimately be denied by Jesus on the last day.
- D. I think this is the sort of thing Paul is describing in 2 Tim 2:11-13 when he writes: “¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.”
1. There are some who deny Jesus outright, and they will be denied.
 2. But there are others who though they have died and risen with Him, and though they are enduring day by day, they are at times faithless and struggling. And to such people, hear me now, Jesus would say: “Though you are faithless right now, dear child, I will be faithful to you.” [And this leads us to my last point for the morning . . .]

(3) Resting in the Holy Spirit (vv. 11-12)

Blessed Assurance

- A. What I want you to pick up here in vv. 11-12 is simply the assurance that is ours because we have received the Spirit. Similar to Eph 4:30, Paul writes in Eph 1:13-14: “¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
1. God gives you the Spirit as a down payment, as a guarantee that He will get you to glory. You’re sealed in Him. He’s stamped His name upon you. You belong to Him. You are under His care.
- B. And this is the basic idea that Jesus is communicating to His disciples back in our text. “If you cower, fall away, and deny me before men, well, I will deny you on the day of judgment. But, because you are open to the Spirit and will soon receive the Spirit of the crucified and risen Lord, He will be there for you when you need Him to give you boldness and words, to help you acknowledge Me even in the face of violent opposition”: “¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say,¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” The Spirit will sustain your acknowledgment!

In that Very Hour

- A. Beyond the Spirit’s empowering for witness here, there is another principle that emerges that I think we all will find profoundly encouraging. I suppose this is where I will leave us this morning.
- B. Consider, have you ever played scenarios out in your mind, worried about the future? “What if this will happen? Or that? What would I do? Will I be able to handle it? Will I walk away from God?” And so forth. Perhaps we see inspiring men and women of faith and we think: “I could never do

that. If I were to face what they were facing, I would crack.” Maybe you hear about other Christians like those in India I mentioned earlier.

1. Or right now there’s a friend of a friend who is facing horrific circumstances with her little baby girl. Out of nowhere her heart just started failing and she needs a transplant. She’s like three years old. And this mommy’s posts on her Facebook account are incredibly Spirit-filled, God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, and her baby is lying cut open on an operating table. People from around the world are tuning and they’re coming to Jesus because of her faith.
 - a. And you see that and you say: “I could never do that. I don’t have what it takes.” And you’re right. You don’t. But the implication of Jesus’ words here to these disciples and us is that when you need that grace, when you need the Spirit in that way, He will be there for you.
- C. Jesus tells them this persecution is coming because He doesn’t want it take them by surprise, He doesn’t want them to think He’s abandoned them.
 1. But, immediately after telling them such horrors await, He commands them to do almost the impossible: “Don’t worry about it. Don’t even think about it. Don’t plan and prepare and get your notes all ready to make a defense or whatever else. When you need them, the words will be there.”
- D. And here, then, is the profound principle I was referring to. It is the same sort of thing Jesus is after in the Sermon on the Mount when He says: “[D]o not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt 6:34).
 1. So much of our great burdens come from our mind’s anxious wandering into tomorrow. If we stop right here, within the confines of today, we find God is enough. But when we go there, when we play the torturous “what if . . .” games, well then we find we can barely get out of bed. But it’s not today’s burdens, it’s tomorrow’s that we’ve pulled back onto ourselves today.
 - a. And Jesus is saying, “Stop that. Do not be anxious about that. When you get to tomorrow, God will be there with the grace that you need. You can’t access that today, because you don’t need it for that today. You are facing something else. It may be smaller, but it is enough. You focus your attention on the trials of faith before you today. You press in for the Spirit’s help with what you are facing today—however big or small. And, in itself, this sort of lifestyle—resting in the Spirit day by day—will be the preparation you need for tomorrow.”
- E. His point, ultimately, is not that you don’t need to be responsible, not that prayer, planning and preparation for the future are inherently wrong or unspiritual . . . His point is that you don’t need to be anxious. His point is that God has you.
 1. So let’s press in then this morning. Let’s ask God for help in what we are facing now. Let’s ask Him to help us acknowledge Him in whatever trouble is before us today. That would be more than enough!